

Music, education, and opportunity

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Good Vibrations: what we do

Good Vibrations is a charity known for its use of gamelan music in criminal justice settings. The gamelan is an orchestra of percussion instruments from Indonesia, made up of various metallophones, xylophones, gongs and drums. You can see and hear one at HMP Peterborough here: <https://www.goodvibrations.org.uk/watch-some-clips/watch-a-documentary-on-a-typical-gamelan-in-prison-project/>



Image 1: In front of the gongs, a pair work with each other to create an interlocking pattern on the bonang (photo credit: **Francois Boutemy**, 2010).

Good Vibrations runs intensive projects using this unusual medium with the aim of supporting people to:

- ☐ Improve their well-being
- ☐ Become more engaged in learning
- ☐ Develop confidence and motivation
- ☐ Develop transferable life and work skills
- ☐ See themselves with positive self-identities and positive futures

Since 2003, Good Vibrations has worked with more than 3,300 participants in 53 different secure institutions in the United Kingdom. It is a particularly communal form of music-making where participants are compelled to work together.¹

Good Vibrations goes into prisons, Young Offender Institutions, and probation services. It runs week-long projects where groups of up to 20 participants work together to learn to play a gamelan orchestra from scratch. They learn traditional pieces, compose, improvise and conduct, and also learn about Indonesian culture and associated art-forms, such as shadow puppetry. The projects are available to any person convicted of an offence in contact with these services, and are particularly well-suited to people with mental health needs or personality disorders, Vulnerable Prisoners, and those not engaging in work or education.

Sessions are punctuated by reflective group discussions, which support participants to develop communication skills and social skills. Participants can also gain modules of nationally-recognised Team-working or Musical Ensemble Skills qualifications. Throughout the week, participants work together to devise a concert, which they perform to their peers, staff and others on the last day. As well as receiving a completion certificate and professionally-mastered CD of their music, Good Vibrations offers progression support to participants as they return to the community, through the Keep in Touch programme.

The choice of medium—gamelan—is crucial:

- ☐ It's novel, so people tend not to form prejudices about it
- ☐ It's accessible and adaptable for all abilities
- ☐ It's formed of layers, so as you fit your part in, you grow listening and non-verbal communication skills
- ☐ It can be played without any prior musical training or knowledge of musical notation
- ☐ It's communal, so everyone's contribution is equally important

1. Henley, J., Caulfield, L.S., Wilson, D. and Wilkinson, D.J. (2012) Good Vibrations: Positive Change through Social Music-Making, *Music Education Research*, 14, 499–520.



Image 2: A flip-chart from an exercise which supports participants to explore social dynamics through the safe lens of music (photo credit: Gigi Chiying Lam, 2016).

What the research tells us about Good Vibrations

Research evaluations of Good Vibrations have consistently found positive outcomes for participants,² and the effectiveness of the project is evidenced through nine pieces of independent research by Birmingham City University, University of London, Bath Spa University, University of Worcester, Nottingham Trent University and The Royal College of Music. These publications have investigated the impact the charity's interventions have had both with the general prison population and on women, older men, young offenders, and men convicted of sexual offences. Research methods have included focus groups, interviews, psychometric measures, case studies,

participant observation, pre and post programme measures, questionnaires, skills rating, adjudication reports and emotion scales.

Henley (2018)³ and Digard et al. (2007)⁴ identified the following as important features of Good Vibrations' approach:

- ❑ setting parameters to create safe spaces in which participants can develop physically, musically and socially;
- ❑ giving power to participants so they develop ownership of their work, which then leads onto self-regulation;
- ❑ constantly making space and creating opportunities for participants to flourish as individuals and members of a team;
- ❑ exploring social dynamics through communal music-making to help participants reflect on how they function in groups;
- ❑ letting awkward moments happen so participants can figure out how to get past them themselves;
- ❑ recognising that conflict is a natural part of group functioning, and that it can lead to creative problem-solving and transformation.

Gamelan supports isolated prisoners to develop inter-personal and team-working skills that can help them cope better with being in prison, and so contribute to reductions in self-harm incidents and suicide.⁵ A significant finding in the research on Good Vibrations to date is the increase in communication skills and social skills that participants experience. Through communal music-making, people who don't normally socialise have discovered they can cope better in group environments.⁶ Caulfield *et al.* (2010) discuss how, 'communicating with other participants leads to greater tolerance and, for some, these greater levels of tolerance and openness continue after release from prison'.⁷

Post-project, participants have identified that they are more able to express their emotions, especially in front of people they did not know.⁸ Research has found that participation in gamelan projects can improve

2. Henley, J. (2014) Musical learning and desistance from crime: the case of a "Good Vibrations" Javanese gamelan project with young offenders. *Music Education Research*. 17, 103-120.
3. Henley, J. (forthcoming, 2018) Music, Emotion, and Learning. In P. Gouk, J. Kennaway, J. Prins, and W. Thormählen (eds.) *The Routledge Companion to Music, Mind and Wellbeing: Historical and Scientific Perspectives*. London: Routledge.
4. Digard, L., von Sponeck, A. G., and Liebling, A. (2007) All Together Now: The therapeutic potential of a prison-based music programme, *Prison Service Journal*, 170, 3-14.
5. Wilson, D. and Logan, M. (2006) *Breaking Down Walls: The Good Vibrations Project in Prison*. Lincoln: The Firebird Trust.
6. Digard et al. (2007).
7. Caulfield, L., Wilson, D. and Wilkinson, D. (2010) *Continuing Positive Change in Prison and the Community*. Grant Report to Good Vibrations.
8. Winder, B., Sperling, V., Elliott, H., Lievesley, R., Faulkner, J. and Blagden, N. (2015) Evaluation of the use of the use of 'Good Vibrations' percussion courses to improve motivation to change and treatment readiness with convicted sexual offenders embarking on treatment programmes, Sexual Offences, Crime and Misconduct Research Unit, Psychology, Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham.

participants' listening skills, and the experience gives much needed space to less extroverted individuals to find their voice within a group.⁹ Participation in a Good Vibrations' gamelan project has been found to promote confidence and self-esteem. Wilson and Logan (2007)¹⁰ interviewed participants who indicated that they wanted to change their offending behaviour because of this new-found self-confidence: 'The final performance in front of an audience promotes a huge sense of pride and achievement, which in turn increases participants' confidence and self-esteem'.¹¹

Many of the people Good Vibrations works with in prison have rarely experienced a sense of achievement in the past. The professionally-produced CD of their work that is made on the project, therefore, demonstrates a highly-significant achievement whilst inside, which creates positive discussion points for visits and communication with the outside world.¹²

'Participants talk about the humanising experience of the project and the freedom it makes them feel, despite being in prison'.¹³ The projects have helped reduce anxiety levels for participants, enabling them to feel more relaxed and cope better with stress.¹⁴ Some participants have even reported stopping self-harming during a project week.¹⁵ Furthermore, some participants have commented that they consciously avoided acting on their anger and having confrontations with other people during the project because they didn't want to mess up the performance, after having worked so hard on it. Several participants were pleased and surprised that they had managed to control their anger in this way.¹⁶

The gamelan projects help participants develop more trust in their own ability to make meaningful, valid decisions¹⁷ and an ethos of collective responsibility grows. The facilitators encourage a culture of shared

leadership and joint decision-making, which enables participants to become better at communicating with, and listening to others.¹⁸

*The development of group self-regulation seemed to be driven by: respect for instructors; a genuine desire to learn; and a commitment to producing a high-quality performance, which necessitates a focused team approach.*¹⁹

Responding to need

In the previous section of this article we talked about what the research tells us are the key impacts of Good Vibrations. However, it is also vital to ensure that programmes targeted at those involved in the criminal justice system are able to engage the different groups they may be working with, by matching the style of programme delivery to the participants' needs—this concept is termed 'responsivity'.²⁰

To maximise responsivity, the design of services should be sensitive, for example, to the offender's gender and culture. Increasing responsivity

*will minimise attrition from the programme and maximise the potential of the programme to impact on offending.*²¹

Research has been conducted on Good Vibrations projects working with a variety of different populations, to understand how far Good Vibrations is responsive to the needs of different groups. Below we talk about the research conducted with four specific groups: women; young people; older people; and men convicted of sexual offences.

The projects have helped reduce anxiety levels for participants, enabling them to feel more relaxed and cope better with stress.

9. Caulfield et al. (2010).

10. Wilson and Logan (2006).

11. Caulfield et al. (2010).

12. Wilkinson, D. J. and Caulfield, L. S. (2017). The perceived benefits of an arts project for health and wellbeing of older offenders. *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, 13, 16-27.

13. Caulfield et al. (2010).

14. Winder et al. (2015).

15. Wilson and Logan (2006).

16. Digard et al. (2007).

17. Ibid.

18. Henley (2014).

19. Digard et al. (2007).

20. Antonowicz, D.H., and Ross, R.R. (1994) Essential components of successful rehabilitation programs of offenders, *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 38, 97-104.

21. Hedderman, C., Palmer, E., Hollin, C. with assistance of Gunby, C., Shelton, N. and Askari, M. (2008) *Implementing Services for Women Offenders and Those 'At Risk' of Offending: Action Research with Together Women*, London: MOJ Research Series 12/08.

Women

The needs of women in prison are often varied and complex. From poor educational histories, work and financial needs, to emotional and mental health issues and problems with childcare, many women have a multitude of significant needs that are clearly related to their offending behaviour. Educational achievement and women's emotional well-being have been highlighted as particularly significant issues for women in prison.²²

Two studies have been conducted with Good Vibrations projects in women's prisons.²³ Both studies collected interview data with participants and prison staff, and support the general findings discussed earlier. For example, the findings suggest that the project significantly improved women's communications skills, levels of self-expression, and ability to cope with stress and prison life. In one of the studies, the findings suggested that the project may have a positive impact upon women's levels of self-harming behaviour, but given the limited numbers of participants in this research with a history of self-harming behaviour, this requires more investigation.

I've got children and the project took my mind off worrying about them as I was concentrating and enjoying it. (Participant quote, from Caulfield 2015)

The involvement of prison staff, and the performance in front of an audience, appear to be important factors in any lasting impact of Good Vibrations projects. A particularly notable finding is that completing the project positively changed the way some of the most 'difficult' women were viewed by prison staff. The challenging and vulnerable nature of the women taking part in one of the studies,²⁴ means

they are likely to have greater issues with aggression and emotional/mental health problems than other women in prison and in the community. Given that emotional and mental health problems have been identified as statistically related to increased risk of reoffending and that this is one of the largest areas of need for women in prison, any intervention that addresses this area is to be welcomed.

Young People

Limited research has looked at the impact of taking part in music programmes on young people in contact with the criminal justice system. For example, a study with young people in juvenile detention centres in Australia taking part in a project that involved individual music tuition²⁵ found that engagement in musical learning led to the development of both musical and extra-musical outcomes. A study conducted with young people in contact with the Youth Offending Service in England²⁶ found improvements in musical ability, well-being, attitudes and behaviour, and sentence compliance. However, both of these studies have focused on individual programmes.

Henley (2012,²⁷ 2014²⁸) conducted research with 19 participants in a Young Offender Institution taking part in a Good Vibrations project. The project group included some very vulnerable young people, including some with self-harm issues, some taking medications, suffering from mental health problems, and many suffering from insomnia. Data was collected via participant observation, focus groups, and interviews with the young people.

The research focused on understanding the potential impact of taking part in a Good Vibrations project on individual and social factors, those '*generated through musical development that also are attributed to desistance from crime*'.²⁹ These were divided into two

Educational
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22. Caulfield, L. S. (2012) *Life Histories of Women Who Offend: A Study of Women in English Prisons*, PhD thesis, Loughborough University; Hollin, C. R., and Palmer, E. J. (2006) Criminogenic need and women offenders: A critique of the literature, *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 11, 179-195.
 23. Caulfield et al. (2010); Caulfield, L.S. (2015). *The role of music programmes in English women's prisons: engaging the vulnerable and the 'hard to treat'*. Report for Good Vibrations.
 24. Caulfield (2015)
 25. Barrett, M. S., & Baker, J. S. (2012) Developing learning identities in and through music: A case study of the outcomes of a music programme in an Australian juvenile detention centre, *International Journal of Music Education*, 30, 244-259.
 26. Caulfield, L.S., Simpson, E. and Jacobs, C. (2016). An evaluation of the Youth Offending Service Youth Music Project. Final grant report to Birmingham Youth Offending Service.
 27. Henley, J. (2012) Good Vibrations: Music and social education for young offenders. Evaluation Report. International Music Education Research Centre, UCL Institute of Education.
 28. Henley (2014).
 29. Ibid.

categories: individual agency and social interactions. The research documented musical developments both individually and at a group-level. What is particularly interesting to note is that the researcher observed a direct relationship between the musical developments, and developments in *'listening, observing, negotiating and team work skills in order to transfer their own individual musical development into an ensemble performance'*.³⁰ The research also identified increased motivation and self-determination, with participants learning to see their own personal-strengths. Henley summarises the findings as demonstrating a clear impact on both individual agency and social interactions, where participants develop personally but also improve their ability to thrive in a group setting.

Older People

The number of older prisoners has increased significantly in recent years. Older prisoners (50+) typically report high levels of chronic health conditions,³¹ including mobility issues.³² Mental health issues are also a concern.³³ The most common illnesses reported in one study of older prisoners were psychiatric, cardiovascular, musculoskeletal and respiratory.³⁴

One study has specifically focused on Good Vibrations projects with older prisoners.³⁵ The study adopted a qualitative approach, conducting in-depth interviews with older prisoners at two men's prisons in England. Consistent with previous research, this study found self-reported improvements in communication and social skills, managing emotions, achievement, and motivation to change. The study also reported a number of findings specific to older offenders:

The Good Vibrations project was considered by all participants to be accommodating and easily adapted in order for accessibility issues to be overcome, allowing any prisoner to take part. Participants noted

that there are limited courses on offer for the older prison population, particularly those serving long sentences who have completed mandatory programmes. Good Vibrations provides an opportunity to engage in a project and potentially develop a hobby or interest in something different from the usual prison routine. For participants who were approaching parole, developing an interest and links with an organisation outside of the prison was viewed as an important opportunity.

Some participants noted that the CD recording of the participant's final performance provided discussion points for visits, letters and communication with family and friends. This was seen as valuable, as friends and family often lived far away, or experienced difficulty in mobility themselves, making visits difficult.

A particular group of offenders for which music therapy may have multiple benefits are sexual offenders.

Men convicted of sexual Offences

Winder and colleagues (2015)³⁶ note that *'a particular group of offenders for which music therapy may have multiple benefits are sexual offenders. Although less likely to have experienced the disadvantaged upbringing of the general prison population, they may have particularly poor interpersonal skills'*.³⁷ Poor interpersonal skills are likely to result in social isolation, which is a risk factor for sex offenders. Music may provide a way for individuals who struggle to express themselves verbally to communicate their feelings and emotions.³⁸ Previous research has shown that Good Vibrations programmes improve participants social and communication skills.

One study³⁹ has been conducted with men participating in a Good Vibrations project while imprisoned for sex offences.

The research included a qualitative and quantitative element. The qualitative interviews with participants support previous research, noting positive

39. Winder et al., 2015

30. Ibid.

31. Fazel, S., Hope, T., O'Donnell, I., Piper, M., & Jacoby, R. (2001). Health of elderly male prisoners: Worse than the general population, worse than younger prisoners. *Age and Ageing*, 30, 403-407; Merten, M. J., Bishop, A. J., & Williams, A. L. (2012). Prisoner health and valuation of life, loneliness, and depressed mood. *American Journal of Health Behavior*, 36(2), 275-288.

32. Fazel et al. (2001).

33. Merten et al. (2012).

34. de Viggiani, N., Mackintosh, S., & Lang, P. (2010), Music in time: An evaluation of a participatory creative music programme for older prisoners. Project Report, University of the West of England.

35. Wilkinson and Caulfield (2017)

36. Winder et al. (2015)

37. Hanson, R. K., & Harris, A. J. R. (2000) Where should we intervene? Dynamic predictors of sexual offence recidivism, *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 27, 6-35.

38. Fulford, M. (2002). Overview of a music therapy program at a maximum security unit of a state psychiatric facility. *Music Therapy Perspectives*, 20(2), 112-116.; Loth, H. (1994). Music therapy and forensic psychiatry choice, denial and the law. *Journal of British Music Therapy*, 8(10), 10-18.

improvements in *'Social skills; managing emotions; confidence; escaping the prison routine'*.

The quantitative element of the research investigated if participants were more motivated to engage with psychological treatment, and whether Good Vibrations added any additional 'value' to the standard treatment in the prison. Using validated psychometric measures, and including a control group of prisoners not taking part in a Good Vibration project, the researchers found significant increases in positive beliefs about programmes and a greater desire to change after participating in a Good Vibrations project. The findings were inconclusive for prisoners with an intellectual disability.

The authors⁴⁰ note that taking part in a Good Vibration project may *'promote and increase treatment readiness prior to program participation in further accredited programs, this process can contribute to maximising treatment goals on further programs and fuller engagement in treatment'*.⁴¹

The impact on engagement, learning and progression

Soon there will be further change to prison education—what it looks like, and how it's funded. Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) contracts will end in 2018, and prisons and governors will be given increased flexibility and control over education budgets and the range of provision they can commission. But, however the landscape changes, research and current practice points to the fact that Good Vibrations' interventions are remarkably effective at connecting with prisoners, and 'switching on' something inside them that motivates them and makes them ready to engage with further prison education and work.

Digard *et al.* (2007:13)⁴² found that, 'the sense of achievement experienced at the end of the week was invaluable for the recognition it provided of participants' abilities and hidden potential, which many had lost sight of during their formal education'.

The feelings of freedom and being 'normal again' engendered by the project appear to give some offenders the 'head-space' to begin making a positive change in their lives'.

Their research found that the humanising way in which Good Vibrations' gamelan courses are facilitated was a key factor in connecting with participants and getting them to engage with an educational activity.⁴³

Caulfield *et al.* (2010) note that Good Vibrations projects 'provide participants with a stimulating week that stays vivid in their mind, where they can explore something of themselves, the music and the group. The feelings of freedom and being 'normal again' engendered by the project appear to give some offenders the 'head-space' to begin making a positive change in their lives'. Crucially, these projects act as catalysts for change—participants take learnings and memories with them, which many treat as foundations of positive change to build upon.⁴⁵

Researchers have concluded that Good Vibrations' courses act as gateways into further learning—getting many prisoners into the education department, enrolling on English and Maths courses, who would never previously have done. This is largely due to gamelan's uniqueness; in the gamelan ensemble no one is an expert, and everyone is equal. This removes intimidating elements that are often found in formal education.⁴⁶ 'The project appears to act as a stepping-stone into further education'.⁴⁷ On one project, for example, half of the participants enrolled on

subsequent learning courses in prison, whereas before the project they had chosen not to do so.

*That this attendance also facilitated the prison's achievement of a Key Performance Target is significant, especially as it would seem to have been achieved at a financial cost that was lower than would have been the case had more traditional educational courses been purchased by the prison.*⁴⁸

Because of reasons such as: dislike of the education system; feelings of inadequacy; and fear of failure, people with poor educational backgrounds are

40. Ibid.

41. Ward, T., Day, A., Howells, K., & Birgden, A. (2004), The multifactor offender readiness model. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 9, 645-673.

42. Digard *et al.* (2007).

43. Henley (forthcoming, 2018).

44. Caulfield *et al.* (2010).

45. Ibid.

46. Wilson and Logan (2006).

47. Caulfield *et al.* (2010).

48. Wilson and Logan (2006).

reluctant to engage with formal prison education.⁴⁹ However, after completing a gamelan course, participants' increased confidence allowed them to push their boundaries further.

The sense of achievement gained through the project was something new and highlighted that achieving was something they could do and wanted to continue doing.⁵⁰

Participants experience sustained and positive emotional and psychological impacts after attending Good Vibrations' projects, which spur on further positive behavioural change.

Six months after completing a Good Vibrations course, participants experienced: greater levels of engagement; an increased openness to wider learning; improved listening and communication skills; improved social skills and increased social interaction; improved relationships with prison staff; decreased levels of self-reported anger; and a greater sense of calmness.⁵¹

Participation develops skills, which lead to positive change, for example progressing onto formal

education, and coping better with the experience of incarceration.⁵² All participants said that their social skills had improved, for example that they could communicate better, were more co-operative team-players, and were more effective leaders. Given that motivation to change is influenced by positive interpersonal relationships with peers, Good Vibrations courses have been found to have the potential to motivate offenders to change.⁵³

Summary

Working together to learn to play a gamelan orchestra, Good Vibrations' participants develop skills through a culture of collective responsibility, shared leadership, and joint decision making. A substantial research base exists about Good Vibrations, and tells us that participants: develop social and group skills; improve their communication skills; experience achievement that for many prompts engagement with formal educational programmes; report reduced anxiety levels and an increased ability to cope with stress; and improve their anger management skills.

The research suggests that Good Vibrations projects are responsive to the needs of different groups, including women, adult men, men convicted of sexual offences, older prisoners, and young people.

49. Caulfield *et al.* (2010).⁵⁰ Ibid

51. Wilson, D., Caulfield, L.S. & Atherton, S. (2009). Good Vibrations: The long-term impact of a prison based music project, *Prison Service Journal*, 182, 27-32.

52. Caulfield *et al.* (2010)

53. Winder *et al.* (2015)